



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
9922 Front St. (Hwy M-72)
Empire, Michigan 49630-9797

IN REPLY REFER TO:

February 25, 2005

Y14(SLBE)

Dear Friend:

The National Park Service at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore has extended the public comment period for the *Fire Management Plan Environmental Assessment* (EA) from February 24, 2005 to March 26, 2005. The Lakeshore had received several requests to extend the review period and this 30-day extension will ensure adequate opportunity for public review and comment.

The document under review describes three possible alternative strategies for managing wildland fire in the park. This EA was prepared to better understand the direct, indirect and cumulative environmental effects associated with these alternatives:

- 1) No Action (Suppress All Wildland Fire and Exclude Prescribed Fire);
- 2) Suppress All Wildland Fires But Permit Prescribed Fire; and
- 3) Suppress All Wildland Fires On Mainland, Allow Wildland Fire Use on Manitou Islands, Permit Prescribed Fire.

The document describes and compares the advantages, disadvantages and impacts associated with each alternative. Comments may be mailed to the Lakeshore at the above address or emailed to SLBE_EA@nps.gov. The EA is available for review on the Lakeshore's website at www.nps.gov/slbe and paper copies are available for review at the Lakeshore Visitor Center, as well as at area libraries.

For more information, contact the Lakeshore headquarters at 231-326-5134.

Sincerely,

Dusty Shultz
Superintendent



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
9922 Front St. (Hwy M-72)
Empire, Michigan 49630-9797

IN REPLY REFER TO:

January 14, 2005

Y14(SLBE)

Dear Friend:

The National Park Service at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore announces the availability of the *Fire Management Plan Environmental Assessment* (EA) which describes three possible alternative strategies for managing wildland fire in the park. This EA was prepared to better understand the direct, indirect and cumulative environmental effects associated with three possible alternatives in the management of wildland fire at the Lakeshore: 1) No Action (Suppress All Wildland Fire and Exclude Prescribed Fire); 2) Suppress All Wildland Fires But Permit Prescribed Fire; and 3) Suppress All Wildland Fires On Mainland, Allow Wildland Fire Use on Manitou Islands, Permit Prescribed Fire. The document describes and compares the advantages, disadvantages and impacts associated with each alternative. The National Park Service at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore welcomes you to comment on the EA until February 24, 2005. Comments may be mailed to the Lakeshore at the above address or emailed to SLBE_EA@nps.gov. The EA is available for review on the Lakeshore's website at www.nps.gov/slbe and paper copies are available for review at the Lakeshore Visitor Center, as well as at area libraries.

A public meeting on this EA will be held at 7:00 p.m., February 10, 2005, at the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Visitor Center in Empire.

For more information, contact the Lakeshore headquarters at 231-326-5134.

Sincerely,

Dusty Shultz
Superintendent

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

Empire, Michigan

Fire Management Plan

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

December 2004



U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (Lakeshore) has a draft Fire Management Plan (FMP) dating to 1989, but evolution in Federal fire policy since that time necessitates a change in the park's FMP. The 1995 Final Report of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review provides guiding principles that are fundamental to the success of the federal wildland fire management program and implementation of review recommendations. These recommendations include federal wildland fire policies in the areas of: safety, planning, wildland fire, prescribed fire, preparedness, suppression, prevention, protection priorities, interagency cooperation, standardization, economic efficiency, wildland/urban interface, and administration and employee roles. The 2001 Federal Fire Management Policy update addresses 17 distinct items, the foremost being safety; all FMPs and activities must reflect this commitment.

Proposed Action and Alternatives

The Proposed Action is the approval and implementation of an FMP at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. This environmental assessment (EA) was prepared to better understand the direct, indirect and cumulative environmental effects associated with three possible alternative FMPs at the Lakeshore: 1) No Action (Suppress All Wildland Fire and Exclude Prescribed Fire); 2) Suppress All Wildland Fires But Permit Prescribed Fire; and 3) Suppress All Wildland Fires On Mainland, Allow WFU on Manitou Islands, Permit Prescribed Fire.

Alternative 1 (No Action) – This alternative would continue the present practice of suppressing all wildland fires throughout the park, including both Manitou islands. It would also not use prescribed fire anywhere in the park. In addition to suppressing all wildland fires and not using prescribed fire, Alternative 1 would also not allow for “wildland fire use.” Wildland fire use (WFU) involves the management of fires ignited by natural means (usually lightning) that are permitted to burn under specific environmental conditions for natural resource benefits, such as improving wildlife habitat or perpetuating fire-dependant plant species. Rather, all naturally and human-ignited fires both on the mainland and the Manitou Islands would be declared unwanted wildland fires and be subjected to appropriate suppression actions. In the No Action Alternative, one Fire Management Unit (FMU) would cover the entire Lakeshore.

Alternative 2 (Suppress All Wildland Fires But Permit Prescribed Fire) – Alternative 2 would also suppress all lightning and human-ignited wildland fires. Similarly, one FMU would cover the entire park. However, in contrast to Alternative 1, Alternative 2 would actively utilize prescribed fire for both hazard fuel reduction and natural and cultural resources management. Alternative 2 would also incorporate current national fire policy guidance. The National Fire Plan of 2000 embodied the philosophical changes in fire policy and outlined four major goals. These included: Improve Prevention and Suppression; Reduce Hazardous Fuels; Restore Fire Adapted Ecosystems; and Promote Community Assistance.

Alternative 3 (Suppress All Wildland Fires On Mainland, Allow WFU on Manitou Islands, Permit Prescribed Fire) – Under Alternative 3, the NPS-preferred alternative, all wildland fires on the mainland would continue to be suppressed, as in Alternatives 1 and 2. However, on North and South Manitou Islands, wildland fire use would be permitted. Prescribed fire would be

allowed and utilized on both the islands and the mainland. Two FMUs would be designated at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore – the Island Unit and the Mainland Unit. WFU would be permitted on the Island Unit but not the Mainland Unit. As in the case of Alternative 2, Alternative 3 would also incorporate current national fire policy guidance and the National Fire Plan of 2000.

Environmental Analysis

Environmental issues evaluated in the EA included geology and soils, water resources, floodplains and wetlands, air quality, vegetation, wildlife and fisheries, threatened and endangered species, wilderness, noise, cultural resources, land use, socio-economics, human health and safety, public services, park facilities and operations, and visitor use and experience.

None of the three alternatives generated impacts that would be significantly adverse, or that would cause an impairment of the Lakeshore's natural and cultural resources.

In general, Alternative 1 (No Action) would have impacts on public safety, natural and cultural resources, and socioeconomic values that range from short-term to long-term, localized, and negligible to moderately adverse. In any one year, due to a pattern of low fire frequency and relatively small size in the area, this alternative would have mostly negligible to minor impacts on all resource areas. However, by not conducting hazardous fuel reduction in the most efficient and effective manner possible, Alternative 1 would expose the Lakeshore and its neighbors to a greater risk from more destructive unwanted wildland fires that, over time, would eventually occur during periods of extreme drought in the region. In these years, short-term impacts on all resources from implementing this alternative would increase considerably. By suppressing all wildland fires and prohibiting the use of prescribed fire, thereby favoring fire-intolerant species over fire-tolerant and fire-dependent species of plants and animals, Alternative 1 would also interfere with the natural process of ecological succession at the Lakeshore.

Through the judicious application of prescribed fire (as well as mechanical fuel reduction), Alternative 2 would lower the risk of destructive unwanted wildland fires that could potentially damage park resources and neighboring properties. This alternative would also allow for the use of fire in habitat restoration and cultural landscape management efforts, which would benefit the Lakeshore's natural vegetation communities, wildlife diversity, and cultural resources.

By permitting prescribed fire in selected locations throughout the park, but also allowing for WFU on the Manitou Islands alone, Alternative 3's impacts would likely be quite similar to Alternative 2's, with perhaps some improvement on the Manitou Islands.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

Alternative 3 is the environmentally preferred alternative. Its combination of 1) prescribed fires on both the mainland and the Manitou Islands, 2) wildland fire use on the Manitou Islands only, and 3) fire suppression, will all be used to protect human life and property, reduce hazardous fuel loadings in the park, simulate natural ecological processes, maintain native plant communities and cultural landscapes, and improve wildlife habitat. This alternative best protects and helps preserve the natural and cultural resources in the park for current and future generations.

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